

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
River Corridor Working Group Meeting Minutes
April 9, 2002

Attendees:

Russ Walker	Ken Fulmer	Mark Peterson
Gene Arnesen	Gary Hunt	Jane Ross
Travis Baier	Sera Janson	Trisha Solberg
Dick Cozza	Scott Larson	Julie Stotler
Shaun Deeney	Paul Merluzzi	Clay Urban
Matt Dible	Jerry Nolan	Neville Woodruff

Greetings and Introductions

Group Leader Russ Walker called the meeting to order. The River Corridor Working Group field trip is scheduled for April 12, 2002, and participants are meeting at the Loma boat launch at 8:00 a.m.

Working Group Discussions

The group discussed interpretation issues and agreed that brochures educate the public better than do signs. Also discussed were the issues of both fire pans and porta-johns being required for all River Corridor users.

Robin Lacy, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Realty Specialist, discussed BLM initiatives in acquiring private land within the Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA). The process for acquiring in-holdings requires the development of an exchange (or sale) proposal appraisal, by both interested parties, for that piece of land. A feasibility study must be accomplished, the transfer must be proven to be in the public's best interest, cultural resource surveys must be performed, and finally, an environmental impact analysis must be completed prior to the exchange or sale. Robin covered land exchanges and purchases in the National Conservation Area (NCA). Most landowners appear receptive to land trade discussions, and the BLM is currently working with the Joufflas family.

Camping issues were discussed, especially on the topic of the river corridor's carrying capacity. The field trip is expected to help determine the current situation and to facilitate further discussions regarding managing camping on the river. The extent of BLM authority on this issue was questioned. The Advisory Council meeting will include a discussion on legislative intent of the CCNCA legislation as it applies to river management.

Action item: Determine the extent to which the CCNCA plan can manage camping on the river corridor.

Camping issues discussed:

- Is the current number of sites sufficient, or are there too many?
- Fire pans and groovers are not being used.
- Small groups occupy large campsites.
- How to plan for future use and set limits on acceptable impact.
- Why is it not possible to provide fire rings in established campsites?
- Should an identification system be implemented to assist in enforcement of rules?
- Should questionnaires be used to determine limits (picking up at the beginning, turning in at the end)?
- Group size limits should apply to all users, not just commercial users. Gene Arnesen, BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner, pointed out that the March 1998 Record of Decision (ROD) limits a group hiking up the canyons south of the river to 25 individuals, yet it does not limit group size on the river.
- The need for a full-time ranger at the Loma boat launch and on the river.

A baseline survey was recommended, using photographic points to establish a baseline and conduct an analysis of current conditions. The survey needs to apply Land Health Standards, along with social standards (quality of visit).

A permit system may be needed eventually. Many responded that one of the special features of this section of river, running through the CCNCA, is the ability to float it spontaneously. Other comments included the possibility that permits could apply only for camping use and not for day use. If watercraft were limited, that would naturally limit the number of people in the canyon. A permit system could be implemented after a set carry-capacity threshold, used as a trigger, was reached. If permitting is instituted, consider a regulation allotting one-half of the permits issued to commercial users, and one-half to private users. Any permitting on the river may need to conform to the permit system already in place at Westwater.

It was mentioned that group size limits, permits, and/or other measures could only be used during peak seasons, or times. Others pointed out that the growth rate in recreational use might someday reach a point that every day is a peak day.

Everyone agreed that weed eradication, along the river corridor, needs to be addressed.

Motorized travel was discussed as well. Many of the problems on the river would be alleviated if the Colorado River regulations were followed. The current breakdown, on types of use on the river, is about 85 percent floaters and 15 percent motorized.

Prior to adjourning the meeting, each group member was polled on his or her feeling about river issues:

- National environmental groups are pushing for a total ban of motorized use on this stretch of the Colorado River.
- Enforcement of current regulations is key.
- Keep river use as open as possible and prefer Colorado State control.
- The river runs along a Wilderness area, and boats traveling the river at 35 mph are not appropriate—muscle it down on your own.
- Take care of it.
- It's not broke, don't fix it.
- Increased use, safety hazards, noise pollution, and a constant stream of use will become issues.
- Historic use should be preserved, enforce current regulations.
- Increase in motorized use will drive away floaters.